

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Katie S. Dykes

Governor's Recommended Budget

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Governor Lamont's proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments for FY 2023 for Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), which reflects continued support for our important environmental and energy programs.

DEEP is organized into three branches in order to meet the agency's key, interrelated priorities of protecting the environment and natural resources, providing clean, reliable, and affordable energy and utility service to the families and businesses of our state, and providing our residents with first-rate outdoor recreation opportunities. In the face of emerging challenges and opportunities – including climate change, PFAS contamination, a surge in outdoor recreation interest, scaling up sustainable alternatives to waste disposal, pursuing reforms to regional energy markets, and expanding access to broadband services – DEEP's diverse programs are providing critical services and support for the citizens of this state and our natural environment, at the same time that the agency is prioritizing careful and efficient stewardship of its budgeted resources to meet ongoing mission and programmatic requirements.

As I reported last year, 2020 proved to be a record-breaking year for outdoor recreation across the state, and that trend continued in 2021. This trend reaffirms the importance Connecticut residents place on this State's abundant park, forest, fish and wildlife resources. Connecticut continues to be a leader among New England states, with the second largest outdoor recreation economy. The public continued to flock to the outdoors in 2021, with an estimated 13 million visitors enjoying Connecticut's State Parks and Forests. To preserve the quality of the visitor experience and enhance outdoor recreation, the Governor's budget proposes to allocate \$25 million from Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds to DEEP to improve accessibility, make repairs and improvements to park amenities, and to offer increasing outdoor recreation and education opportunities.

One of the most important services in providing the public a safe and memorable outdoor experience is the work of the Environmental Conservation (EnCon) Police Division. EnCon continues to develop several policies and procedures in accordance with Public Act 20-1, AAC Police Accountability, including the purchase and installation of body-worn and vehicle dash cameras for EnCon Police Officers. The \$156,628 included in the Governor's budget will support the annual cost to equip EnCon Police Officers with body-worn and dash cameras and to help provide for the data storage and management costs associated with these cameras.

In response to JSS Public Act No. 21-2, DEEP established the Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) Grant Program, which is funded by a \$5 million carryforward in FY 2022. DEEP received over 50 expressions of interest for the SMM Grant Program and is currently working with 35 applicants to solicit and review final applicants for projects with potential to significantly impact waste reduction and diversion. Demand for SMM grants among municipalities has exceeded available revenue in this popular new program. The additional \$5 million funded from carryforward proposed in the Governor's budget will help advance the goals of the SMM program.

Governor Lamont's budget recommendations also include:

- A reduction of \$3,853,545 and 32 positions to reflect the transfer of information technology functions to the Department of Administrative Services.
- Funding totaling \$1,843,222 for staff to support the federal infrastructure bill:
 - General Fund – \$129,103 and two positions
 - Special Transportation Fund - \$1,138,861 and seventeen positions
 - PUC Fund - \$575,258 (including Fringe benefits) and four positions
- Carryforward funding of \$100,000 for an interim position to serve as an advisor and project manager for IIJA planning, inter-agency coordination and communications.

In conclusion, DEEP strongly supports the Governor's proposed budget recommendations, which preserve the Department's core programs and provide new funds and positions to support planning and implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, ensuring that Connecticut is well-positioned to capitalize on and benefit from the programs within the bill.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Harrison Nantz at Harrison.Nantz@ct.gov.